



radical democracy

interview

Tom Hayden

civil rights/peace activist

students for a democratic society

california state representative

David Olson interviews Tom Hayden

Tom Hayden was active for decades in the Civil Rights, peace, immigration rights, animal rights, and ecology movements. As a Freedom Rider in 1961, he was beaten and jailed, and was the principal drafter of the *Port Huron Statement*, the founding document of the Students for a Democratic Society, often considered the political manifesto of the American New Left.

Tom was one of the most visible and well-known radical student leaders in the 1960s, staying active in social movements and politics his entire adult life, and serving for almost twenty years in the California State Assembly and Senate, as a progressive Democrat.

Hayden was a member of the editorial board and a columnist for *The Nation* magazine, and was regularly published in the *New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Boston Globe*, *Denver Post*, *Harvard International Review*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Huffington Post* and other weekly alternatives. As Director of the Peace and Justice Resource Center, he organized and spoke out constantly against the recent wars in Afghanistan, Iraq. Tom is the author of many books, including the posthumously published, *Hell No: The Forgotten Power of the Vietnam Peace Movement*.

David Olson interviews Tom Hayden

In April, 2016, Hayden wrote a piece for The Nation magazine endorsing Hillary Clinton over Bernie Sanders for what had become a very intense Democratic Primary. Many progressives felt Tom had betrayed his radical roots by endorsing Clinton, the establishment favorite, over democratic socialist Sanders. His piece revealed an elder's pragmatism while Bernie's "political revolution" was resonating wildly with young folks, and reinvigorating long-time Lefties.

I spoke with Tom twice in the spring of 2016, just before the Nation piece was published. In this excerpt, we talk about the new wave of activism and organizing, the impact of the "Bernie generation" on the Democrats, his "movements versus Machiavellians" model of social change, and the tricky business of memory and movements.

Tom passed away in October, 2016.

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Radical Democracy: The great Freedom Movement organizer Ella Baker said: “In order to see where we are going we must not only remember where we have been, but understand where we have been.” How important do you think it is for us not just remember where we have been, but to *understand* where we have been, in regards to movements and calls for political revolution?

Tom Hayden: It couldn't be more important. Ms. Baker was a mentor of mine when I was a very young man and living the South. She had been working for the NAACP for decades in the South. That is a dangerous job. She became an advisor to the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, of course.

The process of remembrance is not easy. There are too many people who have a quick memory and quick answers, who keep telling you how it was before. I can understand how people in the Occupy Movement or in Black Lives Matter think it's a little bit obnoxious to be lectured by their elders—especially when we elders don't always know what we're talking about, and when we often split along the same sectarian lines or differences that have prevailed for the last fifty years.

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Nonetheless, open-minded reading, open-minded studying, open-minded listening couldn't be more important. It has to proceed along with the battles at the barricades or the ballot box for sure, but it has to be equal in importance.

RD: I think for new activists it's important to understand that this struggle, this movement, has been going on for a long time. There are lessons to be learned, obviously, and understanding this is not a new struggle, but an on-going one, can give the movement strength, I think.

TH: Yes, exactly.

RD: How important do you think it is to figure out where we are in this on-going movement, this process of social change, and to act accordingly?

TH: That's a very good question. My disability is that I could be very much too much a prisoner of my own experience. I feel like inside me is an archeological dig of movement history. I've gone through the beginning of movements and then the decline of movements and the coming of new movements—especially since Seattle—in wave after wave. And it's difficult for me to accommodate myself to their languages, their idiosyncrasies, their new discoveries, their innovations,

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and the extent to which they follow a pattern that I have written about in a model called the “Movements vs. Machiavellians,” to try and explain my version of history and social change in a few charts and a few pages in my book, *The Long Sixties*.

***Movements** are mass gatherings of people outside society's institutional structures who assemble for the purpose of righting a moral injury that those institutions refuse or fail to address.*

***Machiavellians** are power technicians, often from corporate legal firms and national security agencies, who represent the institutional hierarchies of business, government, the military, the intelligence agencies, the media and organized religion. The Machiavellian code excludes values such as honesty, decency, and democratic accountability where they conflict with the primary ethos of preserving and expanding power.*

From *The Long Sixties*, Paradigm Press, 2009.

RD: It's interesting. How much movement is there between the two camps? Can people start off in movements and end up operating as Machiavellians? Can Machiavellians be flipped to support movements?

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TH: That's the point of the model. It's a model of social change, it's not a model based on class, gender, ideology, and so on. It's strictly a model for how social change occurs in stages.

In the beginning there are a handful of very brave people who launch movements out of despair, frustration or they have a material grievance—like they can't vote. But it's also a moral frustration at being denied their humanity and they encounter a lot of hostility at the beginning. Then they make it slowly into the mainstream.

At the other end the Machiavellians start off as the opposite: they are trying to establish hegemony or control, to suppress the rise of any movements. They're prone to over-reaction, which means the movement begins to attract interest from the independent public if the movement, after all, has a point. People don't like the tactics, maybe, but they grant them the point.

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And the Machiavellians begin to debate whether the price of conceding the point is too high, and if there is another way of remaining roughly in control by making a concession. It usually begins with token concessions and token demands. But at a certain point the movement gets enough adherence to be ten or twenty percent sympathizers in the public polls, and that begins to drag you into politics. Because some politicians will use you to oppose you and call for your suppression. Others will use you, in a friendly way, to put on press conferences and get support on your behalf. And in the middle, very political people keep looking for ways to make a deal, so to speak.

This goes on until the movement gains enough militancy and enough majority support to be in the fifty percent range. The political result of that is that the Machiavellians divide into the hard-core naysayers, no surrender, people versus the people who are willing to desegregate a lunch counter for the sake of business profit, for example. Plus, people who morally grant the status of the disenfranchised and people that see it's important for social order that a compromise be effectuated. It can take five years or it can take fifty years, as you know. But finally the victory comes in the passing of the original demand, and from there the legacy issue becomes all-important.

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RD: In terms of the current [2016] Democratic Primary, we have Bernie Sanders who is clearly coming out of the Movements camp. It's hard not to think of Hillary Clinton as in the Machiavellian camp, representing "the institutional hierarchies of business, government, the military..." Is that a fair assessment?

TH: It might depend on which period of history we're talking about. For instance, Hillary was wearing a black armband on Mayday, at Yale. She was part of the legal defense campaign for the Black Panthers at a left-wing law firm in San Francisco. So, it's a process of time.

She probably always wanted to work "within the system," as they say, but she grew to work within the system because she felt she was having success with her causes, especially women's liberation. Fifty years later that becomes much more institutionalized, cemented into the status quo, and Bernie comes along as a new force. Representing an old ideology, but a new force—just as feminism was once new, and had previously been a 19th century force.

It's not frustrating, but what strikes me about all this, David, is the repeated cycle by which it occurs. It's almost entirely predicable, isn't it?

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RD: It seems like it. So, how do we flip over the table? How do we break out of the loop and get lasting change?

TH: I don't know. Experience helps. If people study their own experience and look for patterns, that's the best way out. But sometimes it simply falls apart, and you're defeated by the counter movement which would be represented by Trump and Cruz.

And this had to all effect Bernie, too. Bernie's a lifelong socialist, or Social Democrat, at least. He's belonged to one of the formations within the tradition of Socialism, and he wasn't expecting Occupy. But it confirmed for him his theorizing and it gave him an advantage in being able to explain to people what the hell happened on Wall Street.

RD: I wasn't surprised he decided to run because we had this sort of national litmus test in Occupy. "Who thinks this entire political and economic system is corrupt?" And it turns out that a lot of people agreed.

TH: I think the deepest decision Bernie made was to run in the Democratic Primary. That in itself was an original and tough-minded decision because if it was a Nader

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campaign, a third party campaign, you know where it would have ended up: it would have gotten six percent or whatever Ralph got. With Bernie you're talking about 30-50%, easily. And there is an avenue to the nomination for him. It's narrowing by the day, or by the week, but he's come this far because of the decision to run in the Democratic Party. And at a time of neo-liberalism that was a very wise move, because he had a very clear and understandable reason to oppose the Wall Street deregulation and all the other intellectual nonsense that was promoted by, shall we say, a previous Democratic administration.

But yes, Bernie's timing couldn't have been better.

RD: He's in a great position. He could still win—but even if he loses, we now have a generation of voters who see what were recently considered radical ideas—about healthcare, education, corporate influence—as being back on the table. That's new, and will be felt for many, many years, I think.

TH: Yes. I hope very much that it is and that a new generation of Bernie Democrats is far more significant than Gary Hart Democrats turned out to be. If you want to go back further, it seems to me that the defeat of Trump is as all-important as we thought that the defeat of Goldwater was. But a lot of cynicism set in, some felt it wasn't enough to defeat Goldwater; we had to defeat

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the Great Society, and we had to defeat Liberalism—which was true when it came to Vietnam, but a lot of people benefitted from the Great Society. I would have liked it to be more bottom-up, but the fact is that the Port Huron Statement influenced the authors of the Great Society. And you always have these different currents, as we used to call them, or tendencies within the Liberal Left.

Bernie has now got a lot at stake. Let's say he wins or doesn't win; his destiny and his legacy are based on the outcome of this election. Let's say he falls short—which most people, like myself, think he probably will. I know that's heresy and you're not allowed to say it around Bernie people, so forgive me out there, my friends! But I've always thought you have to have a plan B as well as a plan A. Plan A is you win; what's the angle, how can you win? And plan B is, 'how are you preparing to benefit from a close loss?'

Number one, you have to influence the platform indelibly, and that's really hard, unless you're organized. Number two; you have to consolidate your following into a tendency within the Democratic Party, which is at the same time independent, on its own. But it's political, and it's more Social Democratic and populist than anything we've seen in a very, very long time.

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So first step if Hillary is the nominee is that Bernie has to be the key player in winning the election and defeating Trump. And the benefits from that need to be thought through, negotiated perhaps, but what I'm saying in the language of the Left is that we really need a united front against Trump and the Republicans this year because everything is at stake, and the Supreme Court is at stake and it all comes down to the Bernie Factor. You can think of the Bernie Factor as just as important as any caucus of the Democratic Party; the African American Caucus, the Latino Caucus or the Women's Caucuses.

I don't have the numbers in front of me but the number of Bernie voters, the amount of Bernie money, the number of Bernie's effective, on-the-ground leadership in key swing states—all these things depend on Bernie and on Hillary and Bernie getting along with no bruises, no divisions, no scars and as rapidly and as smoothly as is possible.

I know that's not in the nature of the Left, and it's not in the nature of Democrats. They could do better. But they've been doing pretty well at keeping their focus on their issues and on beating the Republicans.

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Anyway, that's what I'm devoted to doing. I'll spend all my time through November on how we build that united front with attention to the Bernie Factor.

I think it's another heresy for Sanders supporters, and I fear to say it. But observing the trends and the closeness of these two campaigns, even though Hillary has the advantage, Bernie has the spirit. He has the numbers, he has the tremendous staying power. Stranger things could happen than a Hillary/Bernie ticket. "Oh, my God, no!" I can already hear it from Bernie supporters. It's like Lincoln's team of rivals, you know?

The same thing was done by putting Johnson on JFK's ticket. Why was that done? One five-letter answer: Texas. Johnson's job was to win Texas for JFK. And they really didn't like each other at all—and I bet Hillary and Bernie don't like each other any better. I'm not saying that I'm advocating it, but it's the logic of this campaign as it becomes clear that Hillary has the delegate lead and Bernie has the popular base that she really needs. They're de facto allies if they can find a platform that they both can live with, and I do think there's way to bridge some of the differences.

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First of all, Hillary has to stand firm against the TPP—and hopefully Labor will demand that of her. And there's no sense in saying she's too late or too little, because if she's against it, that's good enough because she now has to be against Obama on that, and that's tough.

Secondly, on health care, I think the single-payer people have themselves in a political riddle. I think the way to single-payer is to elect Hillary, next is to elect 6-8 Democratic Senators, third is to contest in the 2018 Congressional races and win some seats back from the Tea Party, and then fourth is to make it a central to the campaign in 2020.

Does that seem like a long time? Yes, it does, if you're eighteen years old or even thirty years old. But four years passes very, very rapidly and in that situation we might have a political consensus that goes beyond Obamacare to health-care for all. That's my hope. I'm unusually hopeful for Tom Hayden.

RD: A lot of folks, coming out of Occupy, for example, talk about radical change. Not that we just need more progressive Democrats, but that we need to be thinking in terms of changing systems. Is that an idea that you entertain these days?

TH: Yeah, but first we have to defeat Trump. Secondly, we have to secure the Supreme Court. I'm sorry folks, these come first.

As to the role of the Left, in my model all serious social change always begins on the margins. On the outside among groups exactly like the ones you describe. They have a material grievance, for instance, the wanton murder of so many young black men by police, and they have the necessary rage, and anger and spirit to do something about it. And they confront power. And then they call up the memory, like of course the Civil Rights movement or the Labor movement, both of which experienced a lot of shootings and beatings, and if they do so they touch a memory of democracy and a belief in democracy and so they expand. And they get from the absolute margins to a mainstream audience, and when you get to a mainstream audience you're inevitably pulled into politics. Not of your choice, but it's a reality.

So, I think that policy demands are absolutely essential. That's where I think Occupy failed because it went so fast. There were too many people who believed in no demands, and then those who believed in demands believed in too many demands! It's the same with the immigrant rights movement.

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But winning core demands means a normative win—a new norm. It means new laws, it means new regulations, and it means building a base to secure those won demands for as long as you can until the next wave comes along. And I think we're at that stage now. It's inevitable what's happened has happened, and I don't think Occupy Wall Street should over-celebrate it, or take too much credit for it, or throw themselves behind Bernie Sanders a hundred percent, either.

They have a demand, which is to fundamentally reshape the financial system—the banks, the savings and loans, the whole thing. Did you know that was in the Port Huron Statement? In 1962 the Port Huron Statement identified the one percent, it was the first document on the Left that identified the one percent as being against the majority of Americans. And we also said that the Labor Movement was the key agency of social change, but that at the same the labor movement needed to be reformed and revitalized from the bottom up. We tried.

The Vietnam War was is what got in the way, I think. But we can try again, and hopefully we can somehow prevent a war presidency, although I think it's becoming increasingly likely.

RD: I'm seeing a lot of young activists who were radicalized in the Occupy movement who may not be working under the Occupy flag any more, but they have created many smaller organizations...

TH: Yes, indeed.

RD: I was recently at a conference about radical transformation in black communities that focused not only on race, but gender, sexuality, immigration, economic issues. A real focus on intersectionality—of defining self with more than one identity. In the sixties there were many inter-related issues and groups: civil rights, peace, economic issues, et cetera. Any insight into how various issues or groups can work together or coordinate effectively?

TH: Well, it's a process. Although I'm not comfortable with the term "intersectionality," because it academicizes too much, and it leaves ordinary people outside the discussion because it makes no sense to them. Everything to me goes back to John Dewey and popular education, and listening, listening, listening.

Whoever came up with the term intersectionality is probably an academic from graduate school—I don't know that for sure, and it's probably arrogant for me to assume that.

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But we've had a lot of over-intellectualizing of plain reality, it seems to me, and the essence of the New Left at the beginning was that we spoke the language of Americans, of everyday people. When we said, "let the people decide," we meant it.

But substance of this issue of intersectionality is real. We've had so many rippling, shall we say, single issue or identity movements one on top of another, one splitting off from the next, it becomes staggering to explain to a lay audience. But it's true. We need coalitions, and coalitions are often composed of individuals who are coalescing themselves because they have more than one identity—as you said, they belong to two or three identities at once.

And that's a wonderful struggle towards synthesis and it sets an example for other people, and it sets the basis for dialogue and an exchange of views between people who have previously have felt that their identities—class, gender, race, whatever—are far apart. But they're not so far apart because of this co-mingling of identities into an individual self, or coalitions that are made up of what seem to be far different identities all at once.

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It's essential to me that the Labor Movement be at the forefront of this, but the Labor Movement of course has to change its own nature. Emphasis, for example, on clean energy jobs above all and recognition that coal is going away, and fossil fuels are going away. But it will be a very hard struggle for environmentalists who generally tilt to be too white and too college educated, and labor, which represents the old and new working class, the low-income workers of today, to get it together.

I've taught at the UCLA School of Labor Studies for several semesters with Latino students at the absolute forefront of the Occupy Movement who are brilliant students, young and coming along, and just so brilliant, and so successful so far, that I think they'll find a way to move forward on these issues. They'll definitely find a way. You know why? Because you have to. There's no single issue anymore. Single issues become paramount for a moment and then they fall into, overlap with other issues any way.

RD: At the 50th Anniversary Conference for the Port Huron Statement you talked about “an understanding of power as cultural hegemony or dominance, a thought system in which there seems to be no alternative.”

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RD: How important is that step: accepting the possibility of an alternative way doing things, of being? Using your radical imagination, and then moving forward to make that vision a reality.

TH: It's crucial to the beginning of a movement. The wake-up is the first step. I suppose it can go too far, but without people getting a grip and seeing that they're being manipulated and massaged into silence or conformity or apathy, nothing will happen. That's where it begins. Of course then you have to ask, "what can we do, what are the options, what do you really mean when you say there is an alternative?" I believe that it goes back to our first discussion; it means "study, study, study and practice, practice, practice."

All of it in an experimental mode, the use of the constructive imagination, if you will, and the exploration of other forms of politics. And I think it's obviously happening.

On a larger scale it's happening in the Bernie movement—but that's a very ethnocentric statement because for blacks and Latinos and Asians, they're just beginning to get Bernie because of the difference of experience.

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TH: Bernie comes from an all-white universe and he won the white primaries, and his base is white. He's done a terrific job of hiring staff who will do outreach and we can see in the millennials a new surge of activism that includes Bernie, among the younger Latinos and younger African Americans. So, it's to his credit. I don't know what would have happened if he had started earlier, taking more positions on matters of race and gender. But it is what it is, as we say, and he has awakened a curiosity and interest in the African American community and that's to the benefit to building a coalition for sure.

RD: People seem to be responding to Bernie's taking for granted the possibility of another way of doing things—with the economy, education, healthcare, politics in general—and offering radical but tangible solutions. Although he says “revolution” and seems to avoid “radical.”

TH: Hmmm... Maybe. I hadn't noticed that. Could be.

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RD: I've been sensitive to that word, especially as we get closer to publishing Radical Democracy. I chose the word "radical" carefully, to reclaim it and put it back into public discourse in a positive way. To talk about systemic or radical change versus moderate reform, or about radical reform versus outright revolution. Sanders seems to avoid using the word, unless he talks about it in the negative, saying, "It's not a radical idea to..." have \$15 minimum wage, or health care for all, or whatever.

TH: Yeah, he keeps saying that.

David Olson: I think maybe the word "revolution" is less scary because people, especially in the corporate media, assume that he's talking about a metaphorical revolution.

There is a sentiment on the far Left that while Bernie would make great ally for radical change in the White House, the real work needs to be done in movements outside of electoral politics. And that's where we should be focusing most of our energy.

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TH: I have my own view, which is that upper-most is the importance of defeating Trump and the Republicans and getting a fifth seat on the Supreme Court. Anyone that has any other priorities, to me, should question carefully what “priority” means to them. You don’t have to wait too long, just a few months, but any slippage can be disastrous for democracy. The mending of fences between Hillary and Bernie, the hammering out of a platform, the key role of Bernie in bringing around the Bernie voters, if that’s what it comes to... anything else, to me, is like people falling back into their old habits of thinking, and reading socialist journals, and so-on and so-on and so-on. I’ve read socialism for fifty years and I can put it aside for a few months to see how this goes.

And if it goes well, everything goes forward. But if it doesn’t go well, everything goes to hell. And people need to be clear-minded about that. There are already people saying that if Bernie loses, they’ll never vote for Hillary. There are people who are going to vote for the Green Party candidate to get one percent of the vote away from the duopoly of the two party system.

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It's just very precarious. The Obama elections were settled by two to three or four percent, and the Obama coalition, without Obama, is going to be more difficult to reconstitute. So, anything else is like a big, fat waste of time unless you're just up late at night, reading socialist journals and have plenty of friends to talk with.

But as I've said: movements erupt mysteriously on the outside margins. It's the foolish few that brings great hope to history—and foolish they were. And it spread like wildfire. That's what happened with Occupy when one splinter of people, led by David Graeber and others, walked away from a meeting was called about what to do about Wall Street, and about ten or twenty people sat on the grass and decided that they were going to build this movement. That's how it begins.

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RD: New/final question...

TH: But that's the nature of being young and improvisational, anyway. And so I take it as inevitable because I don't think there's anyway to lecture someone to do it differently. And the outcome turns out to be good.

And the next generation, the Bernie generation, will lead to a lot of labor leaders, elected officials, university authors, professional protest organizations—all of them are strengthening and growing.

We're talking about people who are twenty to thirty or thirty-five-years-old, and they have long, long progressive-and even radical-futures ahead of them.



This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.

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